

AFTER BLINDNESS . . . WHAT?

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—BY—

ALVIN L. FLOYD

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WHEN blindness occurs in adult life certain mental reactions are capable of bringing on harmful complications. Of these, the over-quick unguided development of imagination is the most dangerous. It is most feared by educators because it slips into the lives of newly blinded persons while they are so filled with remorse that its presence eludes detection; or while the victims are still so unnerved they fail to resist even though they know its effects are extremely intimidating.

In that early stage the imagination easily becomes master of the man. It has suddenly expanded to fill the vacancy created by the loss of sight. In the attainment of that larger proportionate size it loses the perfectness of past development and becomes a great unwieldy force distorted in shape and treacherous of action. It suddenly becomes the one force in a blind individual's life large enough to dominate reason. Harmless little thoughts are caught up into its swirling grasp and grow into creatures of destruction. Simple fancies become creeds and mere suggestions can easily grow into drastic inhibitions.

A wonderful woman tells of how soon after she was blinded, she received a fright from stepping unexpectedly off a six inch curbing. The thought grew in her mind that she would have made the step just the same if the curbing had been a thousand feet high. That single thought led to the agonizing fear that wherever she went a bottomless pit yawned just in front of her and that someday she would step into it—to fall down . . . down . . . down into oblivion.

For many months, everywhere she went, someone else had to go first. Her tiny daughter used to skip along in front of her striking her heels against the sidewalk to make sounds or, continually calling back, "Come mother—Listen—You can hear me. There is no hole here."

A man, newly blind, once heard of another being struck upon the head by a small piece of falling mortar. From this he developed the inhibition that a stone would fall upon him. He would tremble when compelled to walk beside a tall build-

ing. He would walk blocks and blocks to keep from passing one under construction. And invariably when he walked suddenly out of the sunlight into shadow he dodged and threw his arm over his face cowering before the expected blow.

Such incidents are the lesser evils of an unguided development of the imagination. Insane asylums and cemeteries are both crowded with helpless unfortunates about whom inhibitions have first woven their skein of torment and hate and then released their own creature of destruction.

These tragic cases, contrary to general belief, occur quite frequently among the blind, especially where this handicap strikes out a promising career.

Filled to overflowing with remorse—rebellious at having to live in continual darkness, the individual might contrast his present with his former state of affairs. Imagination pounces upon the new trend of thought. It distorts facts and makes that person believe everyone else is comparing his plight likewise. He thereby feeds new fuel to rapidly enveloping fantasies. He feels that his friends are critical. Finally, without tangible evidence, he slips into the perverted conclusion that his own loved ones have assumed the role of traitors. Firm in the belief that he is being hurt he strikes out and the rebound of his own blow carries with it the agonizing realization of a truth that comes too late. He, not they, was to blame.

"Yes!" you interrupt, "but all cases of blindness are not like that."

Don't fool yourself! They might end differently but in every instance the same motivating power that caused one man to dodge falling stones and another to disrupt the confidence of his loved ones is loosed at the very moment that sight is lost.

In spite of the fact that he is suffering a deep sorrow in the throes of a tragedy far greater perhaps than you will ever know, there must be no hint of pity. A sympathetic understanding—Yes! but pity—Never! It is true that newly blind persons think they need pity; it is equally true that they are far better off without it. Every tear we shed for them is an added

load to help crush them deeper into the pit of despair, from whence eventually they will come back groping a long tedious uphill way or remain in the wretched depths until the earth calls back its dust.

Perhaps a page from real life will illustrate this best.

A young newly blinded stranger came to our door and hesitantly knocked.

"I've been advised," he began shakily after we were settled in chairs, "to come to see you. You . . . you see . . . I . . . I . . . am blind;"—and after some questioning he related his story.

The goal of his dreams had been almost within his grasp when blindness obscured all hope. He thought there was nothing left—nothing but suicide.

He was asking for pity, but—that was exactly the thing he shouldn't have. What he really needed and received was words of sympathetic understanding in which were clothed terse yet timely warnings.

Uncontrolled imagination was throttling his every wholesome development. We scorned his idea of suicide. It made him angry. Then we knew we had gained a point. We showed him a new goal and told him only the strong would reach it. The weak would fall by the wayside. A few would probably commit suicide; some would continue groping—hopelessly dependent.

Beginning there he was made to understand the important changes transpiring, even then, in the setup of his four remaining senses.

Sight, the most sensitive, dependable and important of the senses, the co-ordinator of almost all relationships of the human machine, was gone. The discrepancy this created, like the abolition of the most important department of a busy factory, forced unusual readjustments upon every other one of the senses. He alone could decide the extent and degree of fineness to which this readjustment would be carried. His was the power to assimilate a constant stream of force which would carry him ever upward and onward. However, if left to chance, this force would fill his mind and soul with the vermin of discontent and an ever increasing stream of despondency. This would weigh him down and never allow him the happiness of reborn confidence.

Yes indeed—he must safeguard the readjustment of himself, to production under the new system.

Now, perhaps, he would think more in one day than in a whole week, previously. He would be alone too, in spite of the fact that his friends and loved ones were

near. He couldn't see them and the other senses just won't carry the feeling of companionship like sight. Nevertheless when the readjustment was properly made that difficulty would fade before the new mastery of mind. There would be reading to do and a lot of studying. There would be new friends to make, new methods of living to be evolved, in fact a wholly new and very interesting world to conquer.

When he left two hours later there were already signs visible to prove that the harmful direction of his imaginative development had been definitely checked. In his hand he carried a Braille alphabet and in his heart the challenge that he couldn't learn it in one week. After that—there would be no time for idle thought nor idle hands. There was a new form of reading and writing to be mastered. Even of greater importance: The senses of hearing and touch were to be developed, not in the slow protracted way of nature but through carefully planned steps.

He was game—and, having heeded our warning, gained a noble victory as this incident proves.

We met him on the street a month or two ago. His hand-shake was firm, his voice friendly and vibrant.

"We've got a little baby boy out at our home," he confided, then continued, "We're the happiest family in the world. I'm making more money than I ever did and . . . to think . . . once . . . well, I owe everything to you—every day of my life—every hour—"

"No!" He was corrected, "You owe me nothing. *We can pass on to others only those things we have received ourselves.*"

"Then—then someone—someone helped you, like—like you helped me."

"And someday you too, will pass it on."

"Oh," he breathed, after a moment's deep pondering, "Now I understand what you meant when you once said,—'We owe debts of kindness to the future, not to the past.'"

Thousands of others, like that young man, could be spared long hours of heart-ache and helpless floundering if efforts toward saving their hopes were begun immediately after the loss of sight.

This young man was not exceptional in any way. His was not a miracle case at all. It was merely one of many, recent deviations from rock ribbed rules and mis-beliefs.

His progress like others proves that the sooner following blindness readjustments are begun, the less the victim will suffer from quirks, brought about by unguided development of the imagination.

The time honored idea that a newly blinded person must wait until he is resigned to his fate, is entirely erroneous and misleading.

Help them to find themselves! Help them to fight against those inrushing harmful forces that retard proper development of the remaining senses to their new requirements. These forces, in spite of you, will in every case leave scars according to the depth of penetration.

Help them to realize that through training and readjustment their success in any chosen field, will be limited only by their own application and natural inclination to succeed. Your cheerful courageous encouragement, may render their future progress phenomenal.

The first step is to *try to help the newly*

blinded persons to realize that hope is NOT lost. (We do not mean hope for the eyes. The quicker the victim realizes that he must make the most of a new world, the better it is for him.) The greatest aid is rendered, when study is started early, and a definite course is followed.

We hope that in the near future the educational training for the blind will be moved up to the time it should occur. We realize that the sightless become endowed with tremendous powers of concentration. The course for us, now, is to find the way of education, which will properly direct this power. The blind then will find their rightful place as constructive thinkers—and, many, who might otherwise have remained helpless, will carve for themselves, niches, high in historic halls of fame.



Lines Of Retreat

DURING the heat of the last presidential campaign, we heard a man tell about his "Lines of Retreat" in case one candidate was elected. He had a farm for one thing, and if that would not do, a boat in Florida. If that got too hot, Cuba was next, and then South America. Most of us do not become as alarmed over any political situation as this fellow, but there do come times to nearly all of us when we seek a private storm cellar, a hole into which we can drag our weary bodies and beaten spirits and disappear, at least for a short time, from this struggle we call—LIFE.

Unhappy is the man who does not have such a retreat. It need not be a farm in Iowa or a boat in Florida. It can be books or gardens, fields and streams, almost any change from the daily routine—some hobby that unkinks tired nerves and jaded spirits.

Some men fall back on hard physical exertion like handball, boxing, tennis, mountain climbing, pursuing it to the point of exhaustion. Others have found, with Tennyson, that "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," and in the words of the old hymn, they, "Take It To The Lord In Prayer." Others resort to music and some go to a ball game. Mickey Mouse and Betty Boop have cured their millions, and watching two men batter each other to pulp inside a squared circle has solved the problem for many others.

We know several people who hunt up a friend, pour out their hearts in his sympathetic ear, and because SYMPATHY, next to TIME, is the world's greatest healer, God is soon

once more in his Heaven and ALL's right with the world. Others tell us they have learned so to control their minds that by thinking alone they can clear the fog. And still others say that they have only to compare their own troubles with those of people they know have more, and their own seem not worth making a fuss about.

Sleep is another potent retreat. The same sleep, as Macbeth put it, "That knits up the ravelled sleeve of care" and is the "balm of hurt minds." We recall a lecture from a psychology class of years ago on the state of mind that prompts suicide. "Have you ever noticed," the professor asked, "how few Negroes commit suicide? Perhaps the reason is this: He has been brooding over his troubles for some little time and has finally decided to end them all by jumping in the river. On the way there, however, he comes to a sunny spot and decides to sit down a moment to add up his woes once more and make the justification for his act final. Before he knows it, the warm sun has lulled him fast asleep, and when he awakens he has forgotten all about his cares and goes fishing instead. White people would do well to follow his example by sleeping over their troubles before doing anything rash about them."

Perhaps you are one of those rare fortunates who has never yet needed a hole to pull in after you. Then you had better pick out a storm cellar, for some day, brother, you are going to need it, and we say to you, as they say in the theatre, "choose the nearest exit now."

—KVP PHILOSOPHER.

The Hobby Horse Brigade

—BY—

BROTHER BOB



Engraving by Jackson Engraving Co.

ROBERT KINGERY BUELL

IF you were to join me on an early morning stroll beneath the giant Redwoods in Yosemite National Park here in California, with the sunlight sending golden shafts stealing downward from the branches high above and the dew still heavy on the giant ferns, there would be slight difficulty in inspiring you with enthusiasm for trees.

Yes, rightfully, I should be speaking to you within the awesome, hushed cathedral of the Sequoias Giganteas! Sequoias Gigantes is what they call the Big Trees. Who could fail to catch the grandeur and sublimity of these, the largest and oldest living things on earth?

Think of it! In the Giant Forest of Sequoia National Park stands the General Sherman Tree, estimated to be between 3,000 and 4,000 years old, with a height of 272.4 feet and a base diameter of 36.5 feet. Engineers estimate it would produce 600,120 board-feet of lumber. "Believe it or not!" In General Grant Park the General Grant rears its mighty top 267 feet into the air. It has a base diameter of 40.3 feet and contains 542,784 feet of lumber—enough lumber in a single tree to produce a penny box of matches for every man, woman and child on earth!

Inspiration could not fail to come with such impressive surroundings as there is so much with which to fire the imagination—it is a temple where birds praise God; fills the eye with beauty and the ear with rustling melodies. Through what

amazing changes in the history of the world have these serene old giants lived! They have continued upon their steady growth, while millions upon millions of their lesser relatives—cedars, oaks, pines, and the rest, were playing important parts in the destiny of the world.

Yes, the Redwood Grove would be the proper place to present the idea that trees make a fascinating Hobby! May I remind you that a hobby is a favorite pursuit, something that makes life more interesting, whether it be for fun or funds. The one thing that makes it a hobby is that you find true satisfaction in doing it.

Before we undertake the discussion of trees as a hobby, I wish to point out that any subject of deep interest to yourself might apply equally to the various points in this article. Search through your past experiences for a subject that seemed to arouse your curiosity. Try it out. That is the only way to discover whether or not you would find pleasure in it as a hobby. From such an experience, Mrs. Grace Hughes, a friend of mine, discovered her love for trees. Speaking of this, she said:

"Twenty years ago my home was broken up—not by death, and I had four small children, one a little orphan girl I had adopted. It seemed as though I could not live. I lay on a sleeping porch and watched my neighbor's pear tree, first in blossom, and later just the leaves as they

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